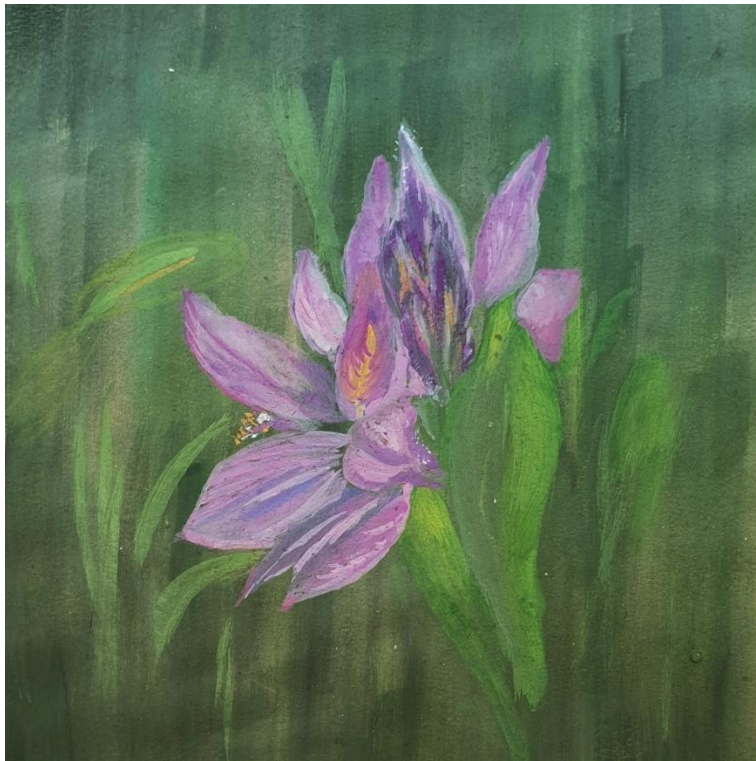


Daoist thoughts and Kingfisherish musings

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Kingfisher gives a lecture:

- When it is a matter of life and death, to survive, one must be intelligent.

The bird pupils ask:

- What is the philosophy you swear by?

Kingfisher puffs out his chest:

- Don't be greedy. Let the greedy fools fight among themselves for a treasure!

In “Luck”; [*Wild Wise Weird*](#) (2024)



Abstract

Daoist philosophy remains deeply relevant to contemporary global challenges, particularly in cultivating Nature Quotient (NQ), fostering peace-building and social harmony, navigating disruptions associated with artificial intelligence, and reflecting on the widening socio-economic inequality. However, Daoism is often perceived as mystical and rooted in symbolic metaphysics, which can create barriers to its adoption in modern societies that increasingly prioritize justified and scientifically validated knowledge. This paper introduces the Kingfisherish perspective—developed primarily through the thought and philosophy of Professor Quan-Hoang Vuong—and demonstrates its strong alignment with the Daoist philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Both perspectives embrace a monistic worldview, illuminate the uncertain nature of knowledge, and highlight the relativity and non-linearity of value as individuals seek dynamic equilibrium with reality (i.e., alignment with the Dao) to reduce uncertainty. Furthermore, Kingfisherish and Daoist thinking both emphasize “order-induced blindness,” whereby artificially constructed social orders and stabilized structures obscure the authentic dynamics of reality and drift away from the Dao. To counter this, they encourage humility and compassion, and employ paradoxes, contradictions, and absurdist reasoning as cognitive pathways that help people overcome unjustified beliefs, convictions, and prejudices and gently guide individuals toward deeper alignment with the Dao. This strong conceptual resonance provides a meaningful conduit for re-examining ancient Daoist philosophies through a scientific lens—particularly quantum-mechanics-inspired reasoning and information-processing theories—while simultaneously drawing on their enduring wisdom to inform responses to pressing contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Daoism; epistemology; ontology; value; ecological intelligence; GITT-VT analytical paradigm; absurdist philosophy; dynamic equilibrium

1. From physics and mathematics to Daoism

In a letter to his son Eduard on February 5, 1930, Albert Einstein wrote:

“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

Indeed, balance is fundamental across many domains—physics, biology, economics, and society. It is especially central in Daoist philosophy. Laozi’s principle of equilibrium teaches that the Dao—as a mechanism of re-balancing—“reduce the excessive and replenish the insufficient.”

Yet, upon closer examination, modern society and business economics often exhibit the opposite tendency. Patterns of imbalance emerge early, transferring resources from the poor and vulnerable toward the wealthy and powerful. This dynamic fuels profound inequality and recurrent episodes of market failure (Capraro et al., 2024; Demir, Pesqué-Cela, Altunbas, & Murinde, 2022; Emadi, Delavari, & Bayati, 2021; Hung, 2021; Stern & Stiglitz, 2021; Vuong, Nguyen, & La, 2025). Imbalance is also evident in humanity’s relationship with nature, where ecosystems are exploited and degraded in the pursuit of economic growth. Such actions expose humanity to growing uncertainty—and even existential threats—as climate tipping points and other planetary boundaries are crossed (Armstrong McKay et al., 2022; Hickman et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2023). These realities highlight the enduring relevance of Daoist thought and its value for understanding and responding to contemporary global challenges (Cooper, 2014; Dang, 2025; Miller, 2003; Tan, 2024).

However, Daoist philosophy—particularly through its most influential text, *Daodejing*—is often considered difficult for the general public to read and fully comprehend (Laozi, 1868). Zhuangzi’s *Nanhuajing* (or *Zhuangzi*) played a crucial role in overcoming these barriers, enabling Daoist ideas to spread widely among ordinary people (Zhuang Zhou, 1964). Through his nature-infused prose, deeply reflective insights, and imaginative narratives, Zhuangzi illuminates philosophical principles in vivid and accessible ways. As a result, *Nanhuajing*, along with *Daodejing*, has come to be regarded as one of the most vital and enduring works of philosophical literature in Chinese cultural history. Across neighboring cultures—such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—scholars have likewise long engaged with these texts, interpreting, debating, and transmitting their core values. The same is true globally today, as Daoist philosophy continues to inspire intellectual inquiry and cultural reflection.

Professor Quan-Hoang Vuong is an influential contemporary thinker in the social sciences and humanities. His thought and philosophy span multiple disciplines and culminate in the development of GITT-VT and the Nature Quotient (NQ) (Vuong, La, & Nguyen, 2025b; Vuong

& Nguyen, 2025b). These frameworks integrate a quantum-inspired worldview, information theory, and mathematical formulation to illuminate complex socio-psychological phenomena (Huu, Hoang, & Ngoc, 2005; Rovelli, 2018; Shannon, 1948; Van Huu & Hoang, 2007). His intellectual contributions are not limited to scientific research; they also extend into literature. One of his most notable creative works is the fable collection *Wild Wise Weird*, which expresses his philosophical insights through imaginative and playful storytelling (Vuong, 2024). In *Wild Wise Weird*—the work that most vividly embodies Vuong’s thought and philosophy—the central protagonist is the Kingfisher (Nguyen et al., 2026; Tran, 2025). For this reason, from this point onward, Vuong’s philosophical outlook is referred to as *Kingfisherish* thought.

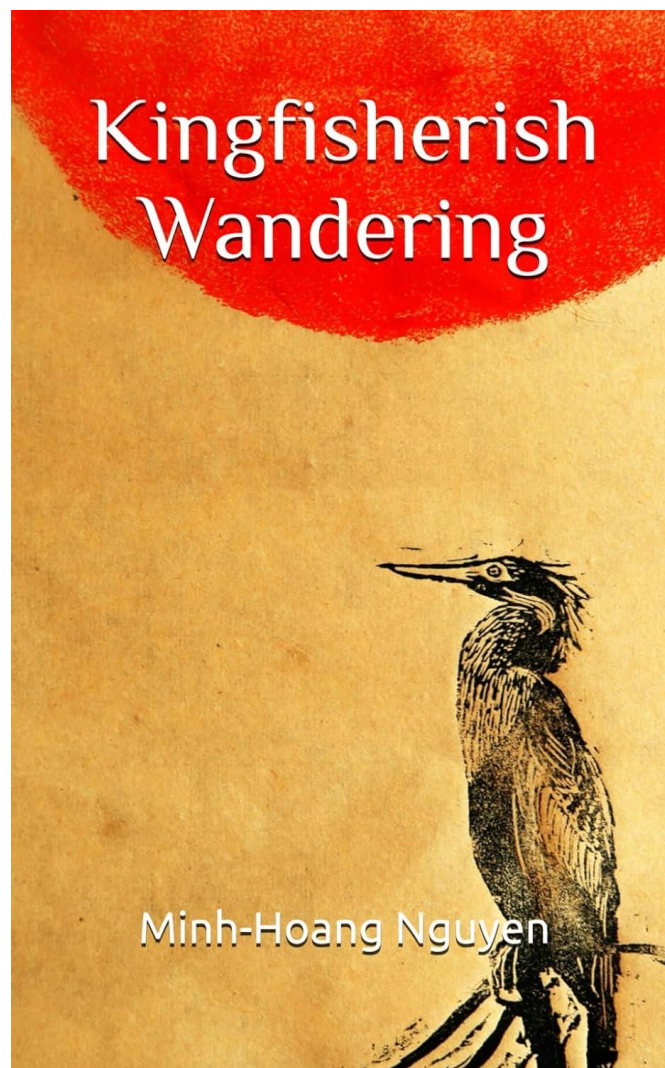


Figure 1: The woven interplay of Kingfisherish and Daoist thought

Kingfisherish thoughts and philosophy resonate strongly with Daoist philosophy, particularly those of Laozi and Zhuangzi. This conclusion can be supported by [*Kingfisherish Wandering*](#), a book that explores Zhuangzi's thought by imagining wandering conversations between Kingfisher (the protagonist in *Wild Wise Weird*) and Zhuangzi (Nguyen, 2025a). The book's interpretive approach is, in fact, consistent with the monistic worldview of Daoism—especially as embodied in Zhuangzi's *Nanhuajing* (see Figure 1).

Zhuangzi's stories convey reflections and imaginative visions that transcend the confines of what can merely be heard, seen, or touched—things that arise and take shape within the mind (as in his depictions of the giant fish Kun, the giant bird Peng, the heavenly pond, or the symbolic value of the gourd and the crooked tree in “Free and Easy Wandering”). These inner contemplations are then allowed to interact with the realities of the world (as seen in his discussions of the sounds of nature, the nature of speech, the temperament of monkeys, success, uselessness, and judgment in “Discussion on Making All Things Equal”). Through this interplay, his narratives invite readers to “set aside their prejudices, and follow the principle of harmony. When harmony is achieved, action becomes possible; when action is possible, results follow without obstruction; and when things proceed smoothly, affairs are accomplished. To accomplish affairs is to draw near to the Dao” (in Discussion on Making All Things Equal).

For this reason, dualistic modes of analysis—which position the interpreter as an external observer and apply binary thinking to dissect Zhuangzi's ideas—often struggle to convey the true spirit of his thought. This difficulty is precisely what Zhuangzi expresses in Discussion on Making All Things Equal, where he writes:

“One who tries to transcend his own prejudices in order to distinguish right from wrong is no different from someone who says, ‘Today I travel to Yue, yet I arrived there yesterday,’ taking what does not exist as if it were real.

[...]

Speech is not merely breath turned into sound. It seeks to convey something—yet what it intends to express cannot be fully determined by words alone. [...] Therefore, it is said: nothing compares to using direct intuition.”

The more one attempts to argue over or evaluate Zhuangzi's thought through rigid analysis, the more one risks falling into the very predicament he describes (Zhuang Zhou, 1964):

“When we speak of the One, and then add our explanation of it, there are already two. When those two are placed alongside the One, they become three. If we continue calculating in this way, even the most skillful calculator could not keep up; how much less an ordinary person.”

Thus, letting one’s own contemplations flow along and interact with Zhuangzi’s ideas is a better approach to enable the reader to grasp their underlying meaning while avoiding unnecessary reasoning, logical dissection, or dichotomizing. In other words, Zhuangzi’s thought is dynamic, relational, contextual, and responsive to time and space. It transcends rigid social conventions and boundaries (e.g., language, value systems, norms, laws, and religious dogmas). To truly understand his philosophy, one must “keep moving” along with his spirit of *wu-wei* (無為)—letting one’s thinking and imagination flow like a stream, passing around the rocks rather than trying to force them aside. The idea for writing *Kingfisherish Wandering* emerged when I recognized the profound alignment between Vuong’s thought and philosophy, particularly in *Wild Wise Weird*, and Daoism. Put simply, as Zhuangzi illustrates through his comparison: the cicada and the cuckoo, who can only flutter up to the elm and the catalpa trees, can never soar ninety thousand *li* to the southern sky alongside the Peng (Zhuang Zhou, 1964).

In a world that is becoming increasingly chaotic—marked by widening inequality and a deepening disconnection between humans and nature—the spread of Daoist philosophical insights and values may offer meaningful ways to address these challenges. By encouraging societies to become less utilitarian and more nature-attuned, free-spirited, tolerant, and open-minded, Daoist thought provides an important ethical and existential counterbalance to the pressures of modernity. Contemporary works and philosophical projects that echo the spirit of Laozi’s *Daodejing* and Zhuangzi’s *Nanhuajing*—yet are expressed in accessible modern language and free from historical and cultural barriers—are therefore essential for the diffusion of these ideas.

Against this backdrop, the present essay seeks to synthesize and analyze Kingfisherish thought and philosophy in dialogue with the Daoist philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Gaining a deeper understanding of these intellectual foundations may enable contemporary societies to approach, interpret, and apply Daoist philosophy through a rigorous, scientifically informed lens—avoiding tendencies toward mysticism while preserving its philosophical depth.

2. The monistic worldview

The worldview of Kingfisherish philosophy is most clearly articulated through the Granular Interaction Thinking Theory (GITT), which is grounded in the quantum mechanics worldview, Shannon’s information theory, and mindsponge theory (Vuong & Nguyen, 2024). Under this framework, macroscopic reality—the world of large-scale objects and phenomena perceptible through human senses—is understood to emerge from interactions among quanta of fields at the microscopic level. Because each quantum carries information, any quantum system inherently contains a corresponding set of informational possibilities (Rovelli, 2018). Since the universe is composed of interacting systems, it simultaneously functions as a vast network of reciprocal information exchange. This perspective is closely aligned with Wheeler (2002)’s “it-from-bit” principle, which posits that all physical phenomena ultimately originate from information—that is, they are “information-theoretic in origin” [19].

Within Kingfisherish philosophy, all living systems are conceptualized as “minds” in a broad sense—entities that both collect and process information—encompassing organisms, biological systems, and societies across multiple levels of complexity. The constituents, internal structures, and surrounding environments of a given mind depend on the analytical level of inquiry. The surrounding environment refers to a broader information-processing context. At the level of the individual, for example, this environment may include—but is not limited to—the family, social groups, society, the nation, ecological and atmospheric conditions, and the digital spaces in which the individual lives and interacts. Through ongoing interaction with these environments, the mind reorganizes its internal system in ways that support its continued existence and development. Only systems that successfully manage these interactions are able to survive, grow, and reproduce. In this sense, effective adaptation to a changing environment depends on the efficient management of information—its acquisition, storage, transmission, and processing. This principle resonates with Darwinian evolutionary theory (Darwin, 2003; Darwin & Wallace, 1858), which emphasizes that survival is determined not merely by strength or intelligence, but by adaptability.

One of the defining features of the Kingfisherish worldview—drawn from quantum mechanics—is relationality. This principle holds that events in the world always take the form of interactions and that the variable properties of any entity exist only in relation to other entities. This relational perspective, which foregrounds the interdependence among systems—particularly between humans and the natural environment—resonates deeply

with Daoist notions of interconnectedness, wherein individuals and societies are embedded within, and ultimately dependent upon, the cyclical processes of nature, or the Dao (Capra, 2010; Capra & Luisi, 2014).

In Chapter 25 of the Daodejing, Laozi writes (Laozi, 1868):

“Something is formed in the chaos, which existed before heaven and earth.

It is quiet and profound. It stands alone and alters not.

It revolves eternally without exhaustion.

It is regarded as the Mother of all beings.

I do not know Its name, except to call It Dao.

When forced to give It a name, I would call It “the Great.”

Similarly, in Chapter 22, Zhuangzi offers a more detailed description of the transformative processes of the Dao—of nature itself—through which all things, including human beings, come into existence:

“Though Heaven and Earth and the four directions are vast, they still lie within the Dao; and though the tip of an autumn hair is minute, it too comes into form through the Dao. All things rise and sink, transforming endlessly throughout their lives. Yin and yang, the four seasons, all move in ordered succession. The Dao appears obscure, as if it were both absent and present; at first without form or trace, yet possessing wondrous efficacy; through it, the ten thousand things are born and transformed, though they themselves do not know it.”

Just as quanta, atoms, molecules, and energy constitute the fundamental building blocks of cells—the basis of both nature and human life (Ernberg, Johansson, Lindblad, Svanvik, & Wendin, 2022; Kurian, 2025; Schrödinger, 1944)—Kingfisherish perspective likewise views the human mind as granular. That is, information (including energy) is inherently limited, giving rise to the subjectivity, biological and cognitive limitations, and fallibility of human beings as they interact with the ecological and social conditions of the spacetime in which they exist (Einstein, 1920). To mitigate these intrinsic uncertainties, effective information processing becomes essential, enabling the mind to ensure that its subjective sphere of influence—the set of interactions among information contained within the mind under its cognitive boundaries—deviates less from reality, or the Dao (Nguyen, Le, & Vuong, 2023).

In *Nanhuajing*, Zhuangzi emphasizes the subjectivity and limitations of human perception in the face of nature's vastness. In Chapter 17, he writes:

“One cannot speak of the sea to a frog living at the bottom of a well, for its world is too confined. One cannot speak of frost and snow to an insect of summer, for its life is bound to a single season. One cannot speak of the Dao to a narrow-minded scholar, for he remains bound by ritual and convention.

[...]

What we know is less than what we do not know; the span of our lives is shorter than the time before we were born. To use what is infinitesimal to understand what is infinite is disoriented, and it can never bring satisfaction.”

Therefore, Zhuangzi suggests that true knowledge dissolves the boundaries between self and world by bringing one into alignment with the Dao—much in the same way that Kingfisherish thought proposes that achieving justified knowledge reduces uncertainty and deepens understanding of the natural parameters, rules, and laws of reality. In Chapter 22, Zhuangzi writes:

“This may be regarded as the tendency of the Dao, the inherent principle of all things. [...] One who understands the Dao will also understand principle; one who understands principle will grasp the art of transformation; and one who grasps the art of transformation is no longer harmed by external things.

[...]

Heaven is within, the human stands without, and Virtue abides with Heaven. One who understands the workings of Heaven and of humankind takes Heaven as the root and stands firm in Virtue; such a person may advance or withdraw, extend or contract, returning to what is essential and contemplating the highest meaning of the Dao.”

Rooted in a holistic worldview that sees human beings as intrinsically connected to their surrounding world, Kingfisherish philosophy—much like the philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi—maintains a deep and intimate relationship with nature. For that reason, the GITT naturally evolved into the concept of the Nature Quotient (NQ)—an intellectual capability that enables humans to comprehend the complex and dynamic interactions of nature, to recognize their own position within these systems, and to live in harmony with, and care for, the natural environment (Vuong & Nguyen, 2025b).

Zhuangzi's exceptionally high NQ is expressed throughout the *Nanhuajing* through his rich imaginative capacity and his recurrent analogies with nature, such as sensing the joy of fish while standing on the Hao River bridge, or dreaming he was a butterfly and awakening to question whether he was Zhuang Zhou dreaming of a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming of Zhuang Zhou. The saying 'The mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind'—commonly used in Chinese society to caution against short-sighted pursuits that overlook hidden risks—originates from a story in Chapter 20 of the Zhuangzi (see Figure 2). The idiom reflects Zhuangzi's high ecological intelligence, revealing his attentiveness to multi-layered relationships and interdependent dynamics in nature and human life.



Figure 2: The mantis

Similarly, in *Daodejing*, Laozi writes in Chapter 25:

“[The Dao] is silent and formless, standing alone and unchanging;
it moves through the universe without ceasing,
and may be regarded as the mother of all things under Heaven.

[...]

Humans follow the Earth;

the Earth follows Heaven;
Heaven follows the Dao;
and the Dao follows what is natural.”

As can be seen, NQ is already evident in the philosophies of Zhuangzi and Laozi; however, the intelligence’s nature is inherently complex, dynamic, and relational—varying not only across minds but also across the spacetime in which those minds interact (Einstein, 1920; Kim, 2025). As a result, previous attempts to interpret Laozi’s and Zhuangzi’s thoughts through rigid, dualistic, or linear reasoning inevitably fell short. In our view, it is for this reason that, although the philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi contain profound foundations for a naturalistic and rational mode of inquiry that later informed the development of science, they have frequently been misinterpreted as mysticism (Kohn, 1992; Murray, 2019). Such misunderstandings largely stem from historical layers of interpretation and from the conflation of Daoist philosophical roots with later religious practices that incorporated elements beyond “ordinary” modes of knowing.

The holistic worldview of Kingfisherish philosophy, which gives rise to the conceptualization of the human capacity to live harmoniously with nature (i.e., NQ) and, in fact, is itself rooted in—and inspired by—nature. From an information-processing perspective, interaction with nature fosters both an intellectual and emotional connection to it, enabling one to perceive the web of interconnected information in nature—including oneself as part of it. When the self is understood as an interconnected and interdependent element within this continuously interacting informational network, the mind gradually aligns—and, in turn, one’s thought and philosophy align—with the Dao. This process is evident throughout Vuong’s life experiences, from childhood to the development of his theoretical and philosophical frameworks (Nguyen, 2024b). Perhaps for this reason, Daoist thinkers have often sought inspiration and principles of self-cultivation in nature, for “Dao is no more—and no less—than the flourishing of nature itself” (Miller, 2003).

3. The uncertainty of knowing

The Kingfisherish approach suggests that the information stored within the mind is inherently subjective and does not always correspond to reality, due to the intrinsic limitations and fallibility of human cognition (Vuong, 2020b; Vuong & Nguyen, 2024). This mismatch creates a deviation between the mind’s subjective sphere and objective reality.

Such deviation may be classified into two main forms: stupidity and delusion. Stupidity refers to a state in which an individual does not sufficiently understand reality, whereas delusion refers to a state in which one holds fundamentally incorrect perceptions about reality (Nguyen et al., 2023).

To overcome stupidity, Kingfisherish thought proposes that, during the information-processing process, the mind nevertheless possesses the capacity to generate new information through creative imagination. This occurs as existing informational elements are recombined and re-connected via plausible reasoning, including processes of generalization, specialization, and analogy (Polya, 1945; Pólya, 1954). This capacity gives rise to the openness, freedom, and imaginative richness characteristic of the kingfisherish wandering. This can be likened to the way Zhuangzi imagines the great Peng bird, which “must soar ninety thousand *li* into the sky so that a thick layer of air can support it from below; only then can its back press against the blue heavens, unobstructed, as it flies all the way to the Southern Sea.” Although this analogy is constructed in contrast to the cicada and the little dove—who can only flutter as far as the elm or catalpa tree—it highlights how the knowing state of those who merely know differs profoundly from that of those who both know and imagine.

However, as the information obtained from the surrounding environment and the information produced through imagination increase, the uncertainty within the mind also increases. This uncertainty (or informational entropy) can be quantified using Shannon’s formula (Shannon, 1948):

$$H(X) = - \sum_{i=1}^n P(x_i) \log_2 P(x_i)$$

Here, $H(X)$ denotes the informational entropy of a random mind X , which contains a set of possible informational units $\{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$ with corresponding probabilities $\{P(x_1), P(x_2), \dots, P(x_n)\}$. Each probability $P(x_i)$ represents the likelihood that a given informational unit x_i is to occur. According to this formulation, entropy—that is, the average uncertainty or “surprise” within the mind—increases sharply when informational units accumulate without a clear prioritization structure, reaching its maximum when all informational units are equally weighted (i.e., $P(x_i) = \frac{1}{n}$). In this state, individuals face the greatest risk of cognitive overload and information loss, as no information is treated as more relevant than others. Thus, the more informational units the mind stores and processes without prioritization, the more likely they are to become fragmented, diluted, or forgotten.

Thus, to optimize the limited information-processing capacity and energetic resources of the mind for survival, growth, and reproduction, individuals must evaluate, distinguish, compare, combine, and assign different probabilities of retention and use to different information based on its relevance to these goals. Information deemed more essential is allocated greater probability—or energy—to maintain and is granted stronger influence over other informational units within the system. Conversely, information considered non-essential or irrelevant is assigned a very low probability of retention or is filtered out entirely in order to conserve energy.

How, then, can such uncertainty be reduced? According to Zhuangzi, this occurs through attaining unity with the Dao—that is, by aligning the mind with the natural order of the surrounding environment and the cosmos. This alignment is illustrated in Chapter 2 (Discussion on Making All Things Equal), where Zhuangzi writes:

“Only those who have attained the Dao can understand this unity, set aside their prejudices, and follow the principle of harmony. When harmony is achieved, action becomes possible; when action is possible, results follow without obstruction; and when things proceed smoothly, affairs are accomplished. To accomplish affairs is to draw near to the Dao—for only by understanding the Dao can one truly succeed. One must acknowledge things as they truly are. To act without needing to know why — that is the Dao.”

From the Kingfisherish perspective, although the mind is free to reorganize and recombine informational units—thereby generating new imagined information—such imagined constructs should be regarded primarily as provisional models that help the mind approach and interpret reality (i.e., the Dao). Through continuous interaction with reality, the mind is able to recognize which internal informational structures are misaligned with the Dao, update its internal configurations, and discard elements that are unreasonable or false. The pursuit of better alternatives can be strengthened through a *reductio ad absurdum*-like process, in which unjustified beliefs, convictions, and prejudices are filtered out. The information that remains after repeated interaction with reality gradually becomes a “justified true belief” (Nonaka, 2009; Zagzebski, 2017).

When one’s actions become aligned with reality, this alignment leads to *wu-wei* (non-action)—a state in which actions unfold naturally, effortlessly, and without forced intention (Liu, 2024). This resonates with Laozi’s teaching in Chapter 48:

“In the pursuit of learning, one increases day by day; in the pursuit of the Dao, one decreases day by day.

Decreasing, and again decreasing, until one reaches non-action.

By not acting, nothing remains undone.

To govern the world, one should follow *wu-wei*; for when one governs through forceful action, the world cannot be well governed.”

This interpretation also helps explain why, throughout *Nanhuajing*, Zhuangzi employs numerous imaginative images that do not exist in the real world to convey his philosophy (especially in *Free and Easy Wandering*), while still emphasizing that one’s thinking must remain aligned with the Dao—that is, with reality. A particularly illustrative example is his reflection on distinguishing reality from illusion in the story of the butterfly dream:

“Once, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he had become a butterfly—fluttering freely and joyfully, unaware that he was Zhou. Then he awoke, and there he was, truly Zhou. He did not know whether he was Zhou, who had dreamed he was a butterfly, or a butterfly now dreaming that he was Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly, there must be a distinction. This is what is called the ‘transformation of things’.”

Interpretively, real information is that which can meaningfully interact with other information in the real physical world, whereas illusory information cannot. This process of interaction and transformation is what Zhuangzi refers to as “the transformation of things”.

In fact, the alignment between Kingfisherish philosophy and Daoism did not emerge from Vuong’s direct engagement with Daoist philosophy from the outset, but rather through an evolutionary intellectual journey spanning nearly three decades. Over this period, his thought gradually accumulated, was refined, and was filtered through interactions with multiple streams of knowledge across disciplines—that is, through different portions of justified knowledge concerning distinct aspects of the natural order. Although Vuong began his scientific career as a finance researcher and mathematician, he soon encountered the conceptual boundary of physics while working on the Black–Scholes partial differential equation in finance (Vuong, 2001). Later, in 2016, while reflecting on the next steps in his scientific career—and on how to inspire future generations of researchers in Vietnam—Vuong drew upon imagery from nature through the metaphor of a bird village, with Mr. Kingfisher as the central character. This creative experimentation gave rise to *Wild Wise Weird*, a satirical and reflective work through which he expressed lessons for himself.

Following this, Vuong continued integrating insights from biology, ecology, and neuroscience to construct theoretical frameworks for explaining socio-psychological phenomena—including the new theory of serendipity and the mindsponge theory (Vuong, 2022b, 2023). These ideas later formed the foundation for the development of the GITT-VT theoretical system and, subsequently, the NQ (Vuong, La, & Nguyen, 2025b; Vuong & Nguyen, 2025b). Through this process, Vuong came to recognize the profound resonance between Kingfisherish view and Daoism, which in turn inspired the writing of *Kingfisherish Wandering*. Viewed as a whole, this intellectual evolution of Kingfisherish thought may be understood as a journey of *fan ben gui zhen* (反本归真)—a rediscovery of the path toward the Dao.

4. The relativity and non-linearity of value

In the Kingfisherish perspective, value formation depends on the interaction of information within the mind—including experiences, perceptions, beliefs, biological traits, emotions, and worldviews—together with newly absorbed information from environmental, socio-cultural, and economic contexts. Through these interactions, the mind reduces entropy and concentrates on information that is meaningful for its survival, development, and reproduction. This view highlights the relativity and non-linearity of values, which have been demonstrated in multiple lines of Vuong’s research and thought, including—but not limited to—entrepreneurs’ cultural values (Vuong, Napier, & Tran, 2013), the value of information in healthcare (Vuong, Ho, Nguyen, & Vuong, 2018), cultural additivity (Vuong, Bui, et al., 2018), the value of art (Vuong, Ho, Nguyen, Vuong, et al., 2018), the (ir)rational costs of science (Vuong, 2018), scientific retraction (Vuong, 2020a), near-suicide decision contexts (Vuong et al., 2023), aesthetic and diversity values (Vuong, Duong, Sari, La, & Nguyen, 2024), and Bitcoin valuation (Vuong, La, & Nguyen, 2025a).

In the *Nanhuajing*, Zhuangzi likewise frequently illustrates how the value of a thing changes when the subject changes (for example, the differing perspectives of fish or trees), when the human viewpoint changes, or when circumstances shift—thereby altering the configuration of interacting information within the mind.

For example, in Chapter 4, there is the story of a great tree at the shrine of the Earth God, which people flock to see in large numbers. Although “its canopy could shade a thousand oxen, its trunk measured a hundred spans in girth, and it rose like a mountain, eighty feet above the ground before branching, with a dozen great limbs large enough to be hollowed

into boats,” it is dismissed by a carpenter as “useless”: “if it is used to build a boat, the boat will sink; if it is used to make a coffin, the coffin will quickly rot; if it is made into a door, the door will absorb moisture; if it is made into household utensils, they will soon break; if it is used as a house pillar, the pillar will quickly be eaten by termites. It is useless for everything.”

After that, the tree appears in the carpenter’s dream and says, “That uselessness is of great benefit to me. If I had been useful for anything, how could I have survived so long and grown so large? You and I are both living beings. How can one living being judge another?”

After the carpenter recounts the story to his apprentice, the apprentice asks, “Since that tree seeks to be useless, then why is it made into a shrine tree for the Earth God?” The carpenter replies, “If it has not become a symbol of the Earth God, wouldn’t it have been cut down long ago? Its way of preserving itself is unlike that of ordinary things. To criticize it based on common thinking, isn’t that a great mistake?”

Perhaps because Zhuangzi understands value in terms of relativity and non-linearity, his thought is often described as being centered on uncertainty and spontaneity (Coutinho, 2014, 2017; Liu, 2024). However, from the perspective of the Kingfisherish view, Zhuangzi’s thinking does not simply contain uncertainty and spontaneity. Rather, it reflects a liberal, imaginative, and deeply insightful cognitive orientation—one that seeks to grasp the intrinsic nature of phenomena and the spacetime contexts in which they unfold. In other words, Zhuangzi’s mode of thinking attempts to reduce misalignment with the Dao by understanding the nature and role of each thing and each event, as well as the contextual conditions across different spacetimes that others may overlook or rarely consider.

This can be viewed as a form of dynamic equilibrium for reducing uncertainty—that is, maintaining order within the mind not by rejecting or neglecting new information (regardless of how irrelevant or counter-normative it may appear), but by continuously evaluating and reorganizing it to achieve a new optimal balance (or order). The Dao is always in motion, independent of our awareness; thus, the ongoing internalization of new information and the restructuring of internal order serve to bring the mind into a state of harmonious equilibrium with the flow of the Dao (Nguyen, 2026). Even our own existence functions in this way. If we do not act to produce food—or earn the means to obtain it—the vast system of billions of cells that constitute our bodies will eventually break down. In the same spirit, it is worth noting that Zhuangzi lived during the turbulent Warring States period, a time of sociopolitical upheaval and competing doctrines on governance and order (Menglong & Milburn, 2022). These circumstances likely provided the conditions for his philosophy to develop and take shape in the *Nanhuajing*.

A typical example of dynamic equilibrium in Zhuangzi's thinking appears in his response to Huizi, who criticizes him for not weeping after his wife's death and even beating a drum and singing (Chapter 18):

“– No, that is not so. When my wife first passed away, how could I not have felt grief? But then I reflected, in the beginning, my wife originally had no life; not only did she have no life, she did not even have form; not only did she have no form, she did not even have *qi*. From within that dim and hazy realm, something gathered into *qi*; *qi* then transformed into form; form transformed into life; and now life has transformed again into death. How is this any different from the cyclical turning of the four seasons? Now she rests peacefully within the Great House [Heaven and Earth], and if I were still wailing loudly beside her, would that not show that I fail to understand the nature of life and death? For this reason, I do not weep.”

Similarly, this notion of dynamic equilibrium is also clearly reflected in Kingfisherish philosophy, which also emerges in a period of profound uncertainty shaped by information overload, globalization, the interaction and collision of multiple cognitive and cultural systems, declining global and social stability due to conflict, war, climate change, and the rise of AI. This dynamic equilibrium can be observed across many stories in *Wild Wise Weird* (Vuong, 2024).

For example, in the story “Weirdest Fishhook,” Kingfisher the Wise teaches his disciple kingfishers about the wisdom of fishing. He tells them that “the species that catches fish best, the most, and the fastest is Humans” and asks, “What tool helps people fish?” All the disciples answer the curved fishhook (see Figure 3-a). Kingfisher continues asking, “Do you know which fishhook is the weirdest?” Although the whole class competes to describe their most bizarre fantasies, Kingfisher shakes his head and answers, “No! It’s a straight hook.” All the disciples are surprised and cannot tell how that weird fishhook can catch fish (see Figure 3-b). Kingfisher then explains solemnly, “straight hook was once used to catch... an emperor,” and recounts an ancient story.

The story tells of a sixty-year-old man named Jiang Ziya (姜子牙) who lived in China more than 3,000 years ago. He often went to the river to fish—yet, strangely, he used a straight hook. Because such a hook could not catch fish, he never caught anything, and people throughout the area noticed this odd behavior and began spreading rumors about him. One day, King Wen of Zhou (周文王) heard these rumors and went to meet the unusual old man. When they finally met, King Wen asked, “Old man, how can you fish with a straight hook like that?” Jiang Ziya replied:

“Ordinary hooks can only catch fish. Only this weird hook can catch a future Emperor.”

Jiang Ziya later became King Wen’s chief advisor, helping him reform internal governance and build a strong military and a prosperous economy for the Zhou state. The Zhou Dynasty lasted for nearly eight hundred years. King Wen’s son, King Wu (周武王), eventually ascended the throne as emperor and granted Jiang Ziya the highest honorific title, Shangfu (尚父), meaning “Esteemed Father.”

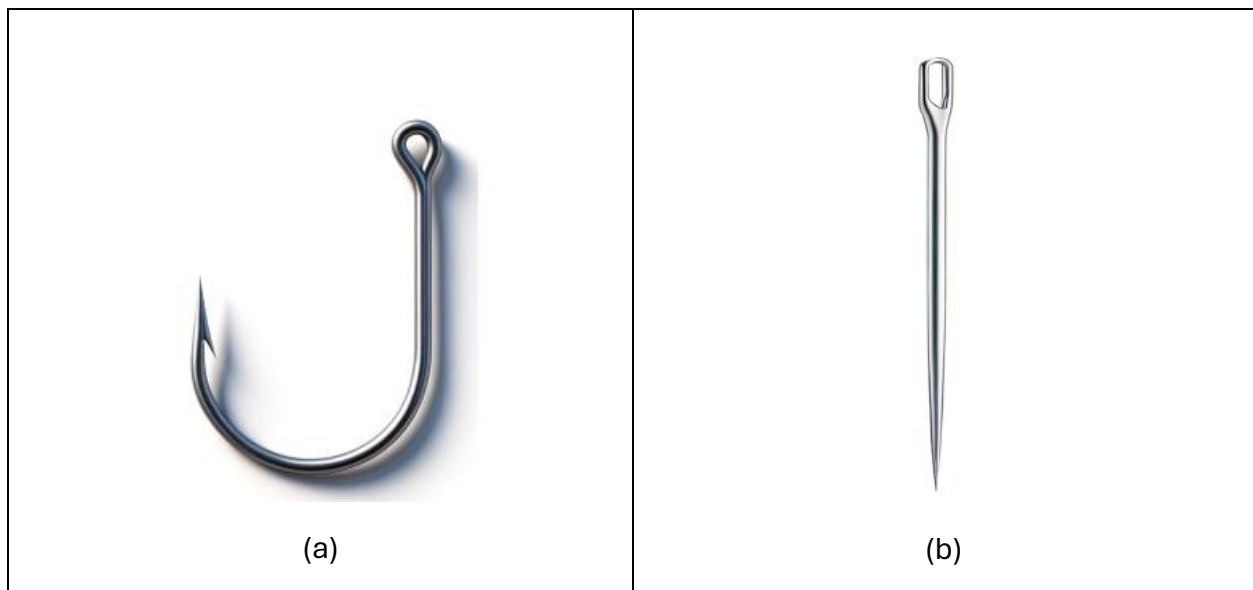


Figure 3: Curved (a) and straight (b) fishhooks

5. The order-induced blindness

In the Kingfisherish perspective, through continuous interaction between internally stored information and information absorbed from the surrounding environment, the mind evaluates, distinguishes, compares, and integrates these informational inputs, assigning different probabilities of retention and use based on their perceived relevance to survival, growth, and reproduction. Information that is assigned a high probability gradually forms into values, which then serve as benchmarks for subsequent information processing.

In some cases, a particular piece of information may be granted an almost absolute probability, thereby overshadowing or disregarding other relevant information. As these

discrepancies in probabilistic weighting accumulate across informational units within the mind, the mind begins to classify them. Although this classification creates a sense of cognitive order, it also reinforces binary thinking—such as right–wrong, good–bad, life–death, self–others, useful–useless, noble–base, etc. Once such mental categories are formed, the mind tends to neglect (assign low probability to) or reject newly absorbed information that is perceived as “useless,” “wrong,” “base,” “of others,” or associated with “death.” The more rigid these categorizations become, the less capable the mind is of perceiving reality without the influence of distorted or illusory beliefs, convictions, and prejudices. This rigidity blinds the mind to subtle environmental cues while sustaining a misleading sense of order—an unsustainable low-entropy state of mind.

In *Daodejing*, to transcend entrenched biases and distortions, Laozi emphasizes that one should:

“Constantly abide by Virtue without straying.

Return again to the state of a child.”

Zhuangzi also reflects extensively on the biases and limitations of binary thinking, explaining how such mental rigidity hinders one’s ability to align with the Dao. A typical example appears in his discussion of the debates between the Confucian and Mohist schools in Chapter 2.

What obscures the Dao to the point that we must distinguish between the genuine and the false? What obscures language to the point that we must divide right from wrong? When is it that the Dao is no longer present, and when is it that words become unacceptable? The Dao is obscured by narrow prejudices; language is obscured by ornate and superficial embellishment. Thus arose the debates between the Confucians and the Mohists. What one school affirms as right, the other condemns as wrong; what one rejects as wrong, the other upholds as right. To perceive what is right within what they call wrong, and to perceive what is wrong within what they call right, there is nothing more fitting than the use of direct intuition.”

Kingfisherish thought also emphasizes the need for caution when evaluating the authenticity of information. Many forms of information and value systems that become socially accepted and reinforced to create order—thereby sustaining a low-entropy state within society—are not necessarily true or aligned with the Dao; rather, they are artificially constructed.

A concrete example is how dictators-to-be consolidate power by manipulating the social infosphere and gradually distorting a society’s collective belief system, normalizing lies and

violence as acceptable—even beneficial—modes of behavior. Such manipulation is often carried out through cultural transmitters, including the educational system, formal and informal literature, and mass media. Once lies and violence are socially endorsed and reinforced as mechanisms for preserving a low-entropy social order, they are used to construct an artificial infosphere in which distorted ones replace natural socio-cultural values. This process generates multiple possible mental outcomes that are increasingly disconnected from reality (or the Dao), including blind obedience, internalized and adjusted beliefs (i.e., brainwashing), self-preserving opportunism or fear-driven conformity, herd mentality, and other forms of cognitive and moral detachment (Vuong, 2022a).

Another example of this artificially constructed low-entropy state can be seen in Confucianism. Confucius suggests that each individual is woven into a web of relationships—with family, community, the state, humanity, and ultimately the Dao (Mattice, 2010). To maintain social stability, people must understand their roles within this web of relationships and act in accordance with their social positions and ethical bonds (e.g., loyalty, filial piety, fidelity, fraternity, sincerity). However, if the social order that Confucius seeks to establish is not aligned with the Dao, then these social positions and ethical relationships exist only as a society's shared performative illusion rather than as reality. At the beginning of the *Daodejing*, Laozi states: "The Dao that can be spoken is not the eternal Dao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name." If social positions and ethical relationships are artificially formulated and reinforced, then they resemble a fragile shell (Chapter 38):

“When Dao is lost, only then does Virtue arise;

When Virtue is lost, then comes human-heartedness;

When human-heartedness is lost, then comes Righteousness;

When Righteousness is lost, then comes Ritual.

Ritual is but the thin shell of loyalty and faith, and also the beginning of disorder.

Foreknowledge is but the blossom of Dao, and also the root of folly.”

Indeed, Zhuangzi satirizes Confucius' thought in several chapters of *Nanhuajing*, most notably in “Robber Zhi” (Chapter 29) and “Horses' Hoofs” (Chapter 9). In “Robber Zhi,” Confucius attempts to persuade Robber Zhi—“a man who commands nine thousand followers, rampaging across the realm, invading the feudal states, breaking into walls and houses, driving off horses and cattle, abducting the wives and daughters of others, pursuing

profit to the point of forgetting kinship, showing no regard for parents and brothers, and neglecting ancestral rites”—to abandon his ways through appeals to morality, benevolence, and righteousness. However, instead of being persuaded, Confucius is harshly rebuked and denounced as a “cunning deceiver.”

“You are the one who fabricates doctrines and borrows the names of King Wen and King Wu to legitimize them. You wear a gaudy ceremonial hat and a belt of ox-hide. You babble and preach without working the fields for food or weaving cloth for clothing. With your glib tongue, you manufacture ideas of right and wrong to bewilder the rulers of the world, preventing scholars everywhere from returning to their genuine nature. You invoke filial devotion and brotherly duty only as a pretext to seek titles and enjoy wealth and privilege.

[...]

The greatest robber of all—is you. Why should the world call me ‘Robber Zhi,’ and not call you ‘Robber Qiu’?”

6. Humility and compassion

To minimize the influence of biases and distortions on one’s thinking in the manner of kingfisherish wandering, the first and most essential step is to recognize one’s own biases, limitations, and the inherent uncertainty of knowing. This awareness helps prepare the mind to receive new information from the surrounding environment without immediately neglecting or rejecting it. When new information is integrated, it facilitates the reorganization of the mind and enables it to attain a state of dynamic equilibrium with reality—that is, alignment with the Dao.

At the same time, the recognition of one’s own insufficiencies gives rise to humility. Humility serves as a prerequisite not only for the production of knowledge (i.e., the advancement of understanding about reality, or the Dao) (Vuong & Nguyen, 2024) but also for the self-correction mechanism of science (i.e., the unlearning and forgetting of inaccurate or flawed understandings of reality, or the Dao) (Vuong, 2020a).

Humility is one of the core values of Daoist thought. In Chapter 66 of the *Daodejing*, Laozi writes:

“Why is it that rivers and seas

are rulers of the hundred valleys?
It is because they remain low and deep;
therefore they can stand above all streams.
Whoever wishes to be great among people
must first humble themselves.
Whoever wishes to lead
must place themselves behind.
To stand behind others and put oneself last,
this is the way to avoid arrogance.”

In the chapter “The Great and Venerable Teacher” (Chapter 6), Zhuangzi describes humility as one of the virtues of a True Person (Zhenren, 真人):

“To understand the Way of Heaven and the affairs of humankind is to reach the highest level of knowledge. To understand the Way of Heaven is to know that all things arise naturally, and therefore, one must follow nature. To understand the affairs of humankind is to use what the intellect is capable of knowing in order to protect what the intellect cannot know, so as to live out one’s allotted lifespan and avoid an untimely end. [...] Only a True Person possesses true knowing.

What is a True Person? True Persons of ancient times did not disparage what was small, did not boast of their achievements, and did not seek to attract followers. If they made mistakes, they did not regret them; if they did good, they did not take pride in it. Standing high, they did not feel fear; entering the water, they were not soaked—for their understanding was already in accord with the Dao.

[...]

To simply possess the human form is already something to be grateful for. And the human form itself is but one manifestation among the myriad transformations of the cosmos. How much more delightful, then, is it to contemplate the boundless transformations of all things! Thus, the sage seeks to return to the common root of all beings. We should emulate those who see both long and short life as equally good, who regard life and death alike as part

of the same transformation. And all the more should we follow those who understand that the myriad things are but forms of change within the Dao; are they not truly worthy of imitation?”

Alongside humility, the Kingfisherish view also emphasizes the value of compassion. Although the processes of knowing and value formation are dynamic, complex, non-linear, and relative, their ultimate purpose remains to support the continued survival of the mind. Therefore, whenever conditions allow (e.g., when one has the capacity or sufficient resources), the philosophy encourages creating opportunities and supportive environments that enable others within the same contexts to survive and develop.

As researchers striving for both survival and development, Vuong and colleagues at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Social Research (ISR) have continually observed, compared, innovated, and refined methodological approaches—from the bayesvl R package and the Bayesian Mindsponge Framework (BMF) analytics to the more recent GITT-VT analytical paradigm (La & Vuong, 2025; Vuong & La, 2025; Vuong, Nguyen, & La, 2022). This methodological initiative crystallized during the particularly challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the team recognized that even individuals with clear strategic direction, substantial experience, and strong psychological resilience could still feel disoriented and trapped. This realization raised a critical question: How could other researchers—especially early-career scholars, those with limited resources, or those lacking access to formal methodological training—persist in academia under such conditions?

These concerns were intensified by the growing competitiveness of the academic environment and increasing pressure from publication and citation metrics. In practice, many researchers withdrew entirely from the academic path; even within ISR, several members departed during the pandemic. Such experiences became a major source of motivation for the team to make all software, code, and data openly accessible in order to reduce the costs of doing science and to establish the SM3D Community (Vuong & Nguyen, 2025a).

After nearly three months of development beginning on April 7, 2022, the SM3D Community (SM3D Portal) was officially launched on June 22, 2022. The platform was designed to support researchers through on-the-job coaching in conducting research using BMF analytics, while simultaneously fostering a collaborative environment for knowledge exchange and community building. The Portal operates according to three key objectives (Jin et al., 2023):

- (i) To promote global knowledge exchange and collaboration grounded in openness, transparency, equity, and innovation;
- (ii) To create opportunities for researchers—particularly early-career scholars and those from low-resource settings—to participate in collaborative research projects applying BMF analytics; and
- (iii) To provide an enabling environment for participants to develop research ideas, produce scholarly outputs, and enhance methodological and academic writing skills, with theoretical, technical, and editorial support from the ISR research team.

The philosophy of compassion in Kingfisherish thought also resonates with Laozi's teachings. Laozi maintains that “reduce the excessive and replenish the insufficient” is a law of the Dao of Heaven—a principle through which natural balance is sustained (Chapter 77):

“The Dao of Heaven is like a drawn bow.

It pulls down what is high and raises up what is low.

Reduce the excessive and replenish the insufficient.”

Therefore, he teaches that the sage should:

“Acts without relying on merit,

completes achievements without remaining attached to them,

and does not wish others to see or praise his virtue.”

7. The absurdist approach to Dao

Dao (道) embodies the meaning of fan ben gui zhen (反本歸真)—returning to the original source and reverting to the true self. In Laozi’s philosophy, paradoxes are often used as a guiding method to help people transcend conventional binary thinking, overcome judgments of right and wrong, and shed entrenched biases. By doing so, the mind can become pure, like that of a “child,” and move closer to the Dao. In Chapter 48, Laozi writes:

“In the pursuit of learning, one increases day by day; in the pursuit of the Dao, one decreases day by day.

Decreasing, and again decreasing, until one reaches non-action.

By not acting, nothing remains undone.

To govern the world, one should follow *wu-wei*; for when one governs through forceful action, the world cannot be well governed.”

From a Kingfisherish perspective, this passage suggests that the more one learns through rigid categories produced by binary thinking—such as right–wrong, good–bad, life–death, self–other, useful–useless, noble–base—the more the mind becomes clouded and driven by desire, shaped by distorted or illusory beliefs, convictions, and prejudices. By contrast, learning from the Dao of nature leads to *wu-wei*—a state of alignment in which one does nothing contrary to nature, avoids imposing personal will upon the world, and yet allows things to be accomplished naturally.

For Zhuangzi, apparent contradictions are intentionally constructed within these binary boundaries so that they may be resolved through a monistic viewpoint, dissolving rigid mental and social structures. Because of these contradictions, Zhuangzi is often referred to as the sage of uncertainty (see also Chapters 3 and 4). In *Discussion on Making All Things Equal* (Chapter 2), he writes:

“Everything is both another thing and also itself. When we separate things from ourselves, we cannot perceive this truth; only by harmonizing ourselves with things can we see it. Thus it is said: that arises from this, and this also arises from that. For example, people distinguish between life and death—yet in reality, life is also death, and death is also life. What can be attained is also what cannot be attained; what cannot be attained is also what can be attained. Affirmation is also negation, and negation is also affirmation. Because the sage does not cling to fixed distinctions, he shines brilliantly in the heavens.

The self is others, and others are the self. Others have their notions of right and wrong, and we also have our notions of right and wrong. Is there truly any ultimate separation between them and us? Let us no longer oppose ourselves to others—for the essence of the Dao lies precisely there. This pivot rests at the center, and therefore, it is able to respond to the boundless transformations of all things. “Right” transforms without limit, and “not-right” also transforms without limit. Thus it is said: there is nothing better than relying on direct intuition.”

Similar to the way Laozi and Zhuangzi employ paradoxes and contradictions to guide individuals toward the Dao, Kingfisherish philosophy also adopts an absurdist approach—most vividly expressed through the stories in *Wild Wise Weird* (Nguyen, 2024a). This approach centers on the mind’s information-processing mechanisms, illustrating how

something that initially appears beneficial, useful, good, or right may suddenly transform into what is costly, useless, bad, or wrong—and vice versa—depending on the (non)existence of particular information and the dynamic interactions between internal cognition and contextual conditions. When such abrupt reversals occur, they reorganize perception by exposing absurd reasoning that ordinarily remains hidden beneath pre-existing informational structures, beliefs, and values. By bringing these overlooked cognitive constraints into awareness, the stories gently encourage readers to move beyond personal greed, desire, and prejudices rooted in binary thinking, nurturing a subtle return to the pure, primordial essence of the Dao.

The story “Face Saving” is a typical illustration of this form of absurdity. It begins with the seemingly ideal marriage between Kingfisher and Lady Kingfisher. As the philosopher of Bird Village, Kingfisher’s union with a stunning, graceful, virtuous, intelligent, and skillful Lady Kingfisher is regarded as an honor for the entire community. Everything appears perfect—and, in the eyes of the villagers, it must be. As a philosopher, Kingfisher is expected to stand as a model husband to keep face for the whole Bird Village.

However, when Lady Kingfisher begins laying and hatching eggs, pressures gradually emerge, straining the family’s happiness. Some birds overhear quarrels and begin to suspect that serious conflicts have broken out between the couple. Fearing that the village’s reputation will be tarnished if it becomes known that their philosopher is a domestic abuser who resorts to violence at home, the villagers form an Investigation Committee on Domestic Violence to collect evidence and publicly prosecute Kingfisher.

One night, the investigative team witnesses an argument—calm at first, but increasingly heated—and the entire village rushes to Kingfisher’s home, determined to catch this “violent brute” in the act. Yet what they discover is nothing like what they had imagined.

“Inside the burrow, Kingfisher cowers in a corner, trembling.

Lady Kingfisher, three times his size, stands silently, striking him with her beak multiple times.

The first strike hits his tail, and Kingfisher staggers uncontrollably. Regaining his balance, he yells in a show of anger:

— Two fish per meal is enough! What more do you want?

The second strike lands on his back, and Kingfisher staggers again. Regaining his composure, he glares and shouts:

– Neglecting the eggs—don’t you realize your mistake now?

The third strike hits his head, and Kingfisher collapses to the ground. Though unable to stand, he stretches his neck and bellows with defiant bravery:

– Without sacrifice, there can be no lasting happiness. Do you understand?

The birds watch in horror as Kingfisher’s feathers scatter across the cave.”

8. Potential applications and limitations of the philosophy

Through this essay, we aim to present the great alignment between the Kingfisherish perspective and Daoist thoughts, specifically those of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Such great alignment provides a conduit for examining ancient philosophies through a scientific lens, while simultaneously drawing on their wisdom to address contemporary challenges. Many classical philosophical traditions, particularly Daoism, are often associated with mysticism and symbolic metaphysics, which can make them difficult to adopt in modern societies that increasingly prioritize justified, scientifically validated knowledge. By reframing Daoist insights through lenses of quantum mechanics-inspired reasoning and information-processing theories, the Kingfisherish approach demonstrates how ancient wisdom can be meaningfully reinterpreted in ways that align with contemporary intellectual standards, without losing its philosophical depth. In addition, the approach can be used to interpret the Daoist meanings and principles embedded in artistic works, such as those of Master Muqi Fachang (1210–1269) and Master Qi Baishi (1863–1957) (see Figures 4 and 5) (Nguyen, 2025b).



Figure 4: *Six Persimmons* by Master Muqi Fachang (1210–1269)



Figure 5: *Between Likeness & Unlikeness* by Master Qi Baishi (1863-1957)

Within the Kingfisherish framework, Daoist philosophies are no longer treated merely as abstract spiritual doctrines but as cognitive and informational mechanisms that shape human perception, value formation, decision-making, and social structure and dynamics (Dai & Duflo, 2026). The approach shows how Daoist thinking can inform urgent issues of the present era, such as cultivating the NQ, fostering peace-building and social harmony, navigating the disruption induced by artificial intelligence, and reflecting on socio-economic inequality (Ho & Vuong, 2024; Nguyen, Ho, & La, 2025; Vuong & Ho, 2025; Vuong, La, Ho, & Nguyen, 2025; Vuong, Nguyen, & La, 2025).

Historically, Laozi conveyed the Dao through paradoxes designed to disrupt habitual thinking and reveal deeper truths. Although philosophically profound, such paradoxes can be challenging for many people to grasp. Zhuangzi helped bridge this gap by expressing Daoist thought through parables and allegories, allowing these ideas to spread more widely among the populace. However, Zhuangzi's stories emerged from the socio-cultural context of the Eastern Zhou and Warring States periods; as a result, many of their symbolic settings and metaphors are less relatable to contemporary societies. In this regard, *Wild Wise Weird*—a

representative expression of Kingfisherish philosophy—serves as a modern re-articulation of the Daoist spirit. Written in a contemporary idiom and free from historical, linguistic, cultural, and political barriers, it offers a new conduit for transmitting Daoist insight in ways that resonate with present-day readers. Through its absurdist approach, the work gently unsettles binary thinking, exposes hidden cognitive blind spots, and encourages individuals to return to the pure, primordial essence of the Dao—not through mysticism, but through reflective awareness of how information, and the ways it is ordered, structured, and interacts, shapes human understanding.

This discussion essay also highlights the consequences of order-induced blindness, a cognitive condition in which people become increasingly detached from the Dao as they rigidly rely on preexisting systems of order formed under specific historical conditions, actors, and contexts. Instead of engaging with the living, evolving reality of the present, judgments about right and wrong, good and bad, or success and failure continue to be made through outdated conceptual lenses. As the gap widens between inherited orders and contemporary realities, this misalignment gradually erodes the capacity to perceive the Dao, leading individuals and societies further away from its natural harmony.

When this misalignment intensifies, it often results in mental and social disorder. The problem lies in the fact that people genuinely believe they are “doing the right thing,” yet the outcomes fail to meet emerging expectations or changing realities. Rather than questioning the inadequacy of the existing order, societies tend to reinforce it through institutional mechanisms, power structures, artificial boundaries, and, at times, violence and lies (Vuong et al., 2020). Narratives and threats are constructed to fill the cognitive gap between outdated beliefs and observable reality—all in an attempt to preserve an established order that has already become misaligned with the Dao. The more effort that is invested in defending and sustaining such rigid structures, the more fragile the low-entropy state of social stability becomes. Order turns brittle rather than resilient, while suppressed contradictions accumulate beneath the surface. These latent tensions eventually give rise to greater instability and chaos in the future—not because disorder emerges spontaneously, but because it has long been incubated within an order that refuses to adapt or realign with reality.

This pattern is evident in many contemporary socio-economic systems that elevate particular values, institutions, or development models as universally valid and permanently optimal. In particular, systems grounded in growth-oriented and technology-centric paradigms tend to intensify what may be described as an “innovation curse,” whereby

expensive, energy-intensive technological solutions are prioritized despite their uncertain effectiveness (Nguyen, Gagnon, Tran, & Tran, 2025). Such dynamics not only deepen environmental pressures but also crowd out more context-appropriate and effective alternatives, increase exposure to technological bubbles, and heighten the risk of immiserizing growth due to excessive dependence on limited technological pathways (Vuong, Nguyen, Tran, & La, 2025). In doing so, they obscure environmental and social costs while delegitimizing alternative modes of development.

Within this socio-economic landscape, the world appears to edge toward social fragmentation—especially in parts of Asia, where societies have historically sought to manage uncertainty through hierarchical structures, prescriptive social orders, and deeply embedded role obligations. Yet an increasing number of Gen Z and Gen Alpha individuals are disengaging from these expectations, resisting trajectories of overwork, material competition, and relentless productivity demands. Movements such as “lying flat” (tangping) in China, “just resting” (geunyang swim) in South Korea, and the “enlightened generation” (satori sedai) in Japan represent quiet yet powerful acts of refusal (Lee, 2025). These developments illustrate how order-induced blindness can lead societies to mistake rigid, human-constructed arrangements for natural inevitabilities—ultimately moving them further away from the Dao, even as they believe they are advancing toward it.

One of the most important foundations of modern physics—and a discovery that revolutionized scientists’ understanding of the universe—is the equation $E = mc^2$. It is one of the most consequential implications of Albert Einstein’s Special Relativity. In this equation, the equals sign (=) represents a balance and unity between mass (m) and energy (E)—two entities that had previously been regarded as fundamentally distinct. This insight enabled scientists to recognize a monistic view of reality, in which seemingly separate phenomena arise from a single underlying essence. Today, physicists continue to pursue the final unification of gravity and fields, seeking to demonstrate that all things mutually generate and transform into one another (Rovelli, 2004).

Although Einstein’s equation is mathematically simple, it encapsulates an entire worldview of reality and the cosmos. Like Master Muqi Fachang (1210–1269)’s *Six Persimmons*—a lucid and profoundly influential work—it is both explicit and influential (Nguyen, 2025b). Attempts to overcomplicate it merely lead one in conceptual circles, ultimately returning to nothingness. Viewed in this light, it is not coincidental that Japan was the first country in Asia to achieve the highest level of development while preserving its cultural foundations and Shinto spirituality, nor that it became the place where minimalist lifestyles were elevated

into a globally influential philosophy of living. One of the core foundations of minimalist lifestyles is Zen Buddhist philosophy, of which Buddhist Muqi Fachang is regarded as a seminal progenitor. From the perspectives of Daoist and Kingfisherish philosophy, reality is fundamentally monistic; consequently, actions that accord with the Dao naturally converge toward harmony, coherence, and resonance.

It should be noted that the kingfisherish view also has certain limitations. One of its key limitations is that it is grounded in a high level of abstraction inspired by mathematics and informed by perspectives from quantum physics and information theories. While this integrative foundation allows it to explore complex interactions between information, cognition, and reality, it also means that fully engaging with this philosophical framework requires more than knowledge from the social sciences and humanities alone. To apply Kingfisherish reasoning effectively, practitioners may need at least a basic familiarity with concepts in physics—particularly quantum-inspired worldviews—as well as elements of mathematical logic and abstraction. Without this background, the depth and nuance of the framework may be difficult to grasp or may be interpreted only metaphorically rather than conceptually.

Another limitation lies in the framework's strong dependence on the information sets used in reasoning, and on how these sets are structured and ordered. Since inferences are derived from the interaction, filtering, and integration of information, the quality of reasoning is only as reliable as the information being processed. If the information involved is inaccurate, biased, or rooted in misinformation, the resulting interpretations and conclusions may become distorted (Altay, Berriche, & Acerbi, 2023; Del Vicario et al., 2016). To mitigate this risk, each important piece of information ideally needs to be examined through its own evaluative model or justificatory lens to assess whether it is valid and well-grounded. This, however, generates a paradoxical situation: thoughts that appear simple or intuitive on the surface may actually be constructed upon highly intricate argumentative systems; highly coherent logical structures may arise from unconventional or non-intuitive premises; and even everyday behaviors or beliefs may ultimately be interpreted through principles that echo fundamental laws of the universe—such as those reflected in quantum-mechanical reasoning.

A further limitation is that this philosophical approach invites individuals to move beyond binary modes of thinking—such as good versus bad, right versus wrong—and to relinquish the detached “observer mindset” in favor of becoming part of the ongoing flow of information. While this perspective allows for deeper alignment with dynamism,

interdependence, and transformation, it may also lead to experiences of moral ambiguity. Because it does not always conform to conventional ethical dichotomies, it can appear to conflict with socially accepted moral frameworks that are structured around fixed categories of virtue and transgression. Yet this same ambiguity is also what enables practitioners to step outside rigid, socially reinforced moral orders that may, in fact, be misaligned with the Dao. By loosening attachment to absolutist judgments, the framework creates space to re-examine entrenched norms critically—even when they appear morally unquestionable—and to rediscover more fluid, context-sensitive ways of understanding harmony, value, knowing, and being.

***Remarks:** The world appears to be gradually entering a cycle of chaos, in which war and loss are becoming more frequent and increasingly devastating. Social disorder ultimately originates from uncertainty within the human mind. Why, then, does inner peace—and, by extension, peace among societies—remain so difficult to attain?

Although humans often regard themselves as increasingly advanced and civilized, are wars in the Warring States period, more than 2,200 years ago, fundamentally different from wars today? Perceived uncertainty persists and appears to be intensifying. The critical question, therefore, is whether advanced technologies genuinely alleviate this uncertainty—or merely amplify it.

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